The Hera Pancami Festival

by Radha Damodar dasa

History

In the Caitanya Caritamrta, Madhya Five Chapter Fourteen, this festival is described briefly. Once a year the Deities of the Jagannath Puri temple would journey from Jagannath Puri to the Gundica temple in Sundara Cala upon giant hand pulled chariots called Ratha Carts. Lord Caitanya danced ecstatically all day in the Rathayatra Procession. After five days, Lord Caitanya and His devotees returned with great eagerness to Jagannath Puri to see the Hera Pancami Festival. This is a play traditionally done by men in women's clothes that recalls how, when Lord Krsna desired to see the Gopis in Vrndavana, His wife, the Goddess of Fortune (Hera) became angry and, dressing herself in her most opulent saris and jewels and accompanied by many friends and servants went looking for her husband.

Lord Caitanya: Although Lord Jagannatha enjoys His pastimes at Dwaraka dhama and naturally manifests sublime liberality there, still, once a year, He becomes unlimitedly eager to see Vrndavana **(pointing out to the temple gardens appreciatively)**. All these gardens exactly resemble Vrndavana - therefore, Lord Jagannatha is very eager to see them again.

Externally, He gives the excuse that He wants to participate in the Rathayatra Festival, but actually He wants to leave Jagannath Puri and go to Sundara Cala. In Sundara Cala, the Lord stays in the Gundica temple, which is a replica of Vrndavana. The Lord enjoys His pastimes day and night in various flower gardens there. But, why did He not take Laksmidevi, the Goddess of Fortune, with Him??

Svarupa Damodar: My dear Lord, please hear the reason for this. Laksmidevi, the Goddess of Fortune, cannot be admitted to Krsna's pastimes in Vrndavana. In the pastimes of Vrndavan, the only assistants are the gopis, the village girls. Headed by Srimati Radharani, all of them are the topmost devotees of Lord Krsna, no one else attracts the mind of Lord Krsna so.

Lord Caitanya: Using the car festival as an excuse, Krishna goes to Vrndavana along with His sister Subhadra and His brother Balarama. All the pastimes that take place in those gardens are very
confidential ecstacies of Lord Krsna. No one knows them. Since there is no fault at all in Krsna's pastimes, why does the Goddess of Fortune become angry?

Svarupa Damodar: It is just the nature of a girl afflicted by love to become immediately angry upon finding neglect on the part of her lover. She becomes disturbed that her Husband has not returned and she leaves her fabulous palace in Dwaraka to find her Husband and demand that He return with her. I hear the kirtana of the maidservants of Laksmidevi in the distance. Let us go outside the temple and observe this play, now.

(At this point actors and audience go outside the temple door and assemble to the right and left of the actors. The actresses proceed slowly to the temple chanting Hare Krsna and blowing conch shells. All the matajis, young and old may take part in the procession. Laksmi rides on a gorgeously decorated palanquin carried by four men. All the kirtaners should wear much jewelry and opulent saris, garlands, etc. and carry instruments, weapons, flags, banners and also auspicious paraphernalia such as water pitchers, camera whisk and trays of betel nuts.

When they reach the area where the audience awaits them, headed by Lord Caitanya and Svarupa Damodar, Laksmidevi's palanquin should be perched on a raised area so that Laksmidevi can sit and stand above the heads of the actors and audience. The kirtaners sing "Jaya Laksmidevi, jaya Laksmidevi, Jaya Laksmidevi!" but Laksmi is in an angry moos. Her servants fan her with camera whisks and peacock fans. Prasad is offered but she haughtily refuses.

Now, principal officers of the temple known to the audience (the temple president, treasurer, school teachers, scholars, as well as leading donors) approach the actresses respectfully but timidly.

Spokesman: We are honored to have your darshan at our humble temple, O Laksmidevi! Our cooks will be pleased to prepare refreshments for your entire party and arrange for all your comforts!

Laksmi: I have come for only one thing! I wish to speak to my Husband, immediately!! Why does He hide Himself away?
He Who knows everything, He also knows perfectly well of my impatience and my jealousy. Why has He not come out to pacify me!? Bring Him to me, right away!

1st Brahmana: That I cannot do, My Lady. Lord Krsna has given us all strict orders that it is His desire that He may remain completely undisturbed and not see any guests, sages or family members whatsoever. He is completely on holiday, here. He is taking complete rest and relaxation.

Laksmi: (angrily) He will see me!! I don't need your aid! **(to maidservants)** Arrest all these impudent servants of Krsna, at once!!
(The maidservants attack the men in groups. Two or more distinguished looking Brahmanas are bound with ropes, treated roughly and brought before the angry Laksmidevi.)

1st Maidservant: Here is the temple cook! This other one is the manager of the Sundara Cala temple! **(Each is offered to Laksmidevi and forced to the ground to offer their dandabotts. They are afraid. The crowd of women jeer and shake their weapons, instruments and paraphernalia. Some joke and some make rude remarks about the temple Brahmanas.)**

2nd Maidservant: (Loud, angry) Impudent fools! You are rogues and rascals! You are worse than thieves because you steal the happiness of our Queen! You deserve to be killed most painfully! A real Brahmana would have respect for the consort of the Supreme Brahman!

1st Brahmana: Mercy! Spare us! We're only following orders! We are fools! We cannot even make any decisions on our own! We don't know what is right or wrong!

2nd Brahmana: We are stupid fools! Do not bother with us! We are worthless, less than sudra! We are just cleaning men about the temple, having no other shelter!

Laksmi: Answer me this! Dwaraka City contains more opulence than the whole of the heavens put together - there is every pleasure imaginable there. But, as far as Vrndavana is concerned, it contains a few flowers and twigs, some minerals from the hill, a few peacock feathers and the plant known as gunja. Why did Lord Jagannatha give up so much opulence and go to Vrndavana, leaving me alone?

3rd Maidservant: Why did your Lord Jagannatha abandon the great opulence of the Goddess of Fortune and, for the sake of a few leaves, flowers and fruits, roam about the flower gardens of Srimate Radharani? Your Master is so expert at everything, why does He do such things? Please bring your Master before the Goddess of Fortune!

1st Brahmana: My Lady, who are we to capture Lord Krsna and carry Him anywhere? He is the Supreme Controller. We are merely the

keepers of this temple. Our tasks are cleaning and gardening and serving His meals. Lord Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the Supreme Independent! As the Supreme Enjoyer, He does only what He wants to do!

Laksmi: These trembling fools are not worth killing by noble ladies such as yourselves. A monarch will never kill a fool or a surrendered soul. Still, they must all pay a fine of 1,000 rupees a man and submit to our desires without any more excuses or pleading! We will see Lord Krsna now!

2nd Brahmana: Thank you for your Divine Mercy upon us, Mother Laksmi! Pray be kinder still upon us because we are your servants and also the servants of Lord Krsna. We cannot act independently. We cannot force our Lord to come. We can simply serve Him constantly, whether He is before us or not! But, we will beg His kindness upon us on Your behalf!

1st Brahmana: Yes, we will make all arrangements for Lord Krsna to come to this spot tomorrow at this time and if He wishes to, He will come!

Laksmi: Very well, we will return, for now, being now confident that you will convey to Lord Krsna our eagerness and our impatience!
(The procession turns and leaves, chanting Hare Krsna. The temple administrators, being freed of their bonds, enter the temple and stay there.)

Svarupa Damodar: (laughing with joy) There is no egotistic pride like this within the three worlds; at least, I have neither seen nor heard of it! When a woman is neglected and disappointed, out of egotistic pride she gives up her ornaments and morosely sits down on the floor, making lines on the floor with her nails. I have heard of this kind of pride in Satyabhama, Krsna's most vain queen and I have heard of it in the behavior of the cowherd girls of Vrndavana, who are the reservoirs of all transcendental mellows. But, in the case of the Goddess of Fortune, I see a different kinds of pride. She manifests her own opulence for all to see and even goes with her soldiers to attack her husband!

Srivasa Thakur: Your gopis are engaged in boiling milk and churning it into yogurt, but my mistress, the Goddess of Fortune, sits on a throne made of jewels and gems!

Lord Caitanya: My dear Srivasa Thakur, your nature is exactly like

that of Narada Muni - the Supreme Personality of Godhead's opulence is having a direct effect upon you! Svarupa Damodar is a pure devotee of Vrndavana. He does not even know what opulence is, for he is simply absorbed in pure devotional service.
Svarupa Damodar: My dear Srivasa, please hear me with attention. You have forgotten the transcendental opulence of Vrndavana. The natural opulence of Vrndavana is just like an ocean. The opulence of Dwaraka and Vaikuntha is not even to be compared to a drop!

Lord Caitanya: Go on speaking! Go on speaking!!

Svarupa Damodar: Vrindavana dhama is made of transcendental touchstone. It's entire surface is the source of all valuable jewels and the Cintamani stone is used to decorate the lotus feet of the residents of Vrndavana.

Vrndavana is a natural forest of desire trees and creepers and the inhabitants do not want anything but the fruits and flowers of those desire trees.

In Vrndavana there are cows that fulfill all desires and their number is unlimited. They graze from forest to forest and deliver their milk. The villagers want nothing else.

In Vrndavana, the natural speech of the people sounds like music and their natural motion resembles a dance. The water of Vrndavana is nectar and the Brahmajyoti effulgence, which is full of transcendental bliss, is directly perceived there. The gopis there are also goddesses of Fortune and they surpass the Goddess of Fortune who resides in Vaikuntha. In Vrndavana, Lord Krsna is always playing His transcendental flute, which is His dear companion!
(Srivasa Thakur becomes very blissful. He takes center stage and raises His arms. The audience expects him to speak. For a moment or two he relishes deeply the transcendental pastimes of Lord Krsna.)

Srivasa Thakur: Hari Bol!! Everyone chant Hare Krsna! Please get up! Play mrdanga! Play the karatals! Sing loudly, everyone! Chant the maha mantra, Hare Krsna! **(Have a good leader hold a lively kirtan.)**